"CH'IO T'ABBANDONO" BY FELIX MENDELSSOHN BARTHOLDY: A DRAMATIC IMAGE OF THE EDUCATION AND APTITUDES OF THE COMPOSER

Charles Turley, B.M., M.M.

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APPROVED:

Linda di Fiore, Major Professor
John Michael Cooper, Minor Professor
Jeffrey Snider, Committee Member and
Voice Division Chair
James C. Scott, Dean of College of Music
C. Neal Tate, Dean of Robert B. Toulouse
School of Graduate Studies

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The unpublished concert aria, "Ch'io t'abbandono," by Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy (1825), is representative of the adolescent composer's developing musical aesthetic. In this study, Mendelssohn's education, work ethic, and perfectionism are revealed, paradoxically, as both the catalysts for the piece's composition and also the reasons it was not published during Mendelssohn's lifetime. An exploration of the text, form, thematic usage, and performance demands of the aria yields specific examples of his uniquely balanced romantic-classicist style.

A consideration of possible original performers of the piece, Franz Hauser and Eduard Devrient, leads to further discussion about the nature of the work as both a reflection of Mendelssohn's romantic self-expression and his appreciation for the Baroque melismatic style. The significance of the aria, both stylistic and biographical, is further delineated by a presentation of possible motivations for its composition. The musical setting of the text, as well as the text itself, indicates both Mendelssohn's awareness of himself as a maturing adolescent composer and his desire to be a composer of operatic works, a desire that was never fully realized.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Mendelssohn's Multifaceted Education

Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy (1809-1847) had many educational opportunities provided for him from an early age due to the social and economic status of his family. His father, Abraham Mendelssohn (1776-1835), was a successful banker and his mother, Leah (1777-1842), was the daughter of a wealthy Berlin family, so Felix was able to enjoy, among other things, a first-rate, multifaceted tutelage that was comprised of a thorough training in ancient cultures and language, frequent trips throughout Europe to visit various locales, and a musical education provided by the best teachers in Berlin.

His mother was fluent in English, French, German, and Italian, and had a reading fluency in Greek,[1] which contributed to Felix's later study of Greek plays and philosophy (by Caesar and Ovid) under the instruction of Karl Ludwig Heyse. Felix's study of Greek and, later, Latin, resulted in his eventual translation of Terence's play *The Girl from Andros*, in 1826.[2] This early education in classical antiquity had an obvious and important influence on Mendelssohn's musical aesthetic, because classicism was to become a defining aspect of Felix Mendelssohn's creative output. The young composer

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[1]Herbert Kupferberg, *The Mendelssohns: Three Generations of Genius* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), 94.

[2]Leon Botstein, "Neoclassicism, Romanticism, and Emancipation: The Origins of Felix Mendelssohn's Aesthetic Outlook," in *The Mendelssohn Companion* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001), 5-9.

was certainly also influenced by his contemporaries, especially Weber and Beethoven, as well as by modern aesthetics. Accordingly, some traits of the prevalent romanticism can be perceived in his music as well.

Equally important to the education of Felix Mendelssohn was the prodigious frequency and range of his travels. In his teens, Felix visited Paris, Frankfurt, Weimar, Bad Doberan, and parts of Switzerland and Silesia, during which he met such distinguished figures as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), Ignaz Moscheles (1794-1870), Louis Spohr (1784-1859), and Ferdinand Hiller (1811-1885), men who would figure prominently in his life as a musician. These friendly visits also exposed Mendelssohn to aesthetic viewpoints that were sympathetic to his own. Further, Felix was impressed by the natural beauty of foreign lands, which inspired him to draw landscapes and to compose programmatic music.[3] These experiences helped to cultivate in Mendelssohn a firm appreciation of, and curiosity about, unfamiliar lands and cultures: a strong sense of cosmopolitanism. Conversely, Mendelssohn observed the culture active in Paris in 1825 which was antagonistic to his own German aesthetic. Of more specific importance was the French disdain of Germanic music, which may have been a source of his later prejudice against French culture and music.[4] This anti-French sentiment was a component of the philosophical beliefs of many German nationalists, a group with which

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[3]See David Jenkins and Mark Visocchi, *Mendelssohn in Scotland* (Bristol, Great Britain: Chappell and Company, 1978) for a discussion of Mendelssohn's drawings and the musical compositions that came from them.

[4]Mendelssohn expressed scathing criticism of the music and personalities of the Parisian music scene in a letter he wrote to his mother on 6 April 1825, in *Felix Mendelssohn, A Life in Letters*, ed. Rudolph Elvers, trans. Craig Tomlinson (New York: Fromm International Publishing Corporation, 1986), 33-40.

Mendelssohn probably felt an affinity.[5] Therefore, the experiences he had in Paris helped to cultivate part of his own sense of German nationalism. It can be said with certainty that Mendelssohn's travels were an important part of his education, as well as a fundamental part of his cultural philosophy, which was one of both cosmopolitanism and nationalism.

His initial musical training, received alongside his sister Fanny, was given by his mother, an accomplished musician herself, and included piano lessons. The boy formally studied violin and piano in Paris in 1816 and he began his studies with Carl Friedrich Zelter (1758-1832), who taught him composition, possibly as early as 1817.[6] Zelter was instrumental not only in introducing Mendelssohn to the German poet Goethe, who was to have an enormous impact on the composer's aesthetic sense later in life, but also in exposing the young Mendelssohn to the stylistic genius of Haydn, Mozart, and especially Bach.

The effect of the family's financial security upon the compositional prospects of the young Felix can not be over-estimated; because of the affluence of the family, Felix was able to have many of his works performed at home during Sunday musicales, in an environment that was conducive to his development as a composer. Due to the relatively wide influence of the family, several prominent members of the artistic community, such as A.B. Marx (1795?-1866), Ignaz Moscheles, and Eduard Devrient (1807-1877), not to

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[5]This seems apparent, especially in light of his association with Goethe, and Mendelssohn's lifelong work with the compositions of J.S. Bach.

[6]R. Larry Todd, *Mendelssohn's Musical Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 11-12.

mention Zelter, were also present at these concerts to give the young composer both feedback on the performed compositions and also ideas for new compositions.[7] Furthermore, Mendelssohn was able to have his pieces appraised by his mother and sister, even before these concerts took place, so that Felix could make revisions and corrections during the initial conception of his works, to present them in a more polished form when these informal concerts took place in his home. The support of his family afforded Mendelssohn the opportunity to publish some of his early compositions. As a result, the young composer is often erroneously seen as having had natural talent that he did not have to struggle to perfect.[8] The affluence of his family certainly provided Mendelssohn with material resources that many other young composers did not have. The home environment and educational approach of his parents and teachers also provided Mendelssohn with a uniquely balanced aesthetic, a fusion of classicism with romanticism, of cosmopolitanism with Nationalism, that became the axis of his compositional style. This same educational approach, however, combined with the agenda of the family itself, would conversely foster an obsessively rigorous and impossibly critical work ethic in Mendelssohn with which he would have to struggle for

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[7]Ignaz Moscheles served as Mendelssohn's piano teacher in 1824 and later named his son Felix in honor of Mendelssohn. Eduard Devrient and A.B. Marx both served, in years to come, as Mendelssohn's friendly critics and collaborators. Devrient was especially persistent in providing Mendelssohn with opera libretti over their two decades of friendship, since Devrient was convinced that Mendelssohn's talents were to be best used in the genre of operatic composition. See Devrient's views in his book *My Recollections of Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, and his Letters to Me* [1869], trans. by Natalia MacFarren (New York: Vienna House, 1972).

[8]This viewpoint is explored in detail by R. Larry Todd, *Mendelssohn's Musical Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 4.

the rest of his life.

Mendelssohn's Work Ethic

The cornerstone of the Mendelssohn family work-ethic is to be discovered in the concept of *Bildung*, which was central to German culture in the early nineteenth century. The concept of *Bildung* was passed indirectly to Felix from his grandfather, Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786), a respected Jewish philosopher, by way of Felix's father, Abraham. *Bildung* is essentially a measure of character strength, relative to the level of education, enlightenment, and culture a given person possesses. This has an impact on society as a whole if an entire people can strive for the ideal of *Bildung*.[9] A general elevation of the education level of a group of people would cause a shift of social structure that would theoretically allow the more educated to rise to a position of prominence in society. The rising level of education and social status of the German Jews also carried with it the hope that through the pursuit of *Bildung*, they would be emancipated from the prejudices that had plagued them throughout their history. Striving for *Bildung* had one extremely negative result on the Jewish people of Europe, however. As the Jews displaced the less educated, non-Jewish people of German society, the prejudice against Jews in Europe grew rampant, and remained so for several generations, ultimately resulting in the gross genocide of the Jewish people at the hands of the Nazis in the twentieth century.

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[9]Moses Mendelssohn, "On the question: What does Enlightenment mean?," in *The Mendelssohn Companion*, trans. Douglass Seaton (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001), 24-27.

The pursuit of the ideals of *Bildung* was a way of life for the Mendelssohn family, as it was for many Jewish families, since it represented "the means by which Jews would achieve integration into German society and eventual complete political emancipation."[10] Consequently, from an early age, Mendelssohn was also exposed to much of the resultant prejudice against Jews and would later be denigrated by Wagner, Liszt, and others in their own reactionary pamphlets about Jewish composers. It seems slightly ironic that the concept of *Bildung* was also partly responsible for the family's adoption of the Christian faith, another necessary step toward achieving integration into German society. In combination with the concept of *Bildung*, Abraham and Leah Mendelssohn stressed the importance of such Lutheran values as, "industry, family, and the purposeful use of time."[11] Several early instances of the family's pressure on Mendelssohn to be constantly productive were mentioned by Eduard Devrient:

> If I called in the forenoon upon the mother, and he came with his lunch into the front room, during which he was allowed to quit his work, and we happened to chat longer than the bread-and-butter rendered necessary, the mother's curt exclamation, "Felix, are you doing nothing?" quickly drove him away into the back room... But it was easy to perceive that the most important influence on the son's development was the father... The conviction that our life is given us for work, for usefulness, and constant striving -- this conviction Felix inherited from his father.[12]

This constant drive to learn, perfect, and strive for betterment is also manifest in the

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[10]Marian Wilson Kimber, "'For art has the same place in your heart as mine': Family, Friendship, and Community in the Life of Felix Mendelssohn," in *The Mendelssohn Companion*, ed. Douglass Seaton (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001), 31.

[11]Ibid., 31.

[12]Eduard Devrient, *My Recollections of Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, and His Letters to Me* [1869], trans. by Natalia MacFarren (New York: Vienna House, 1972), 8-9.

nature of the correspondence between Felix and his mother and father. Even while he was away on his travels, his writing style was under constant scrutiny, correction, and refinement by his parents.[13] Thus, Felix was infused from the start with a philosophical, sociological, and emotional need to work, an aspect of his personality that remained dominant throughout his life.[14]

The need for productivity in his early life was fulfilled, in part, by the large amount of composing he did while still an adolescent. The workbooks he used for his exercises and compositions show his labor-intensive and systematic approach to composition,[15] an approach that differs from the unrealistic concept of spontaneous composition some seemed to expect from Mendelssohn.[16] Even though Mendelssohn's output during these early years was prodigious, he left most of these works unpublished. Granted, the motivation for publication often stems from a composer's need for remuneration; since Mendelssohn did not have the same financial hardships as other composers, especially while living at home during his adolescent years, money was certainly not a motivating reason to publish. Even without the need for the revenue from publication, several of his works from this period were published, notably the *Octet* (published in 1833), the piano quartets (opp. 1-3, published 1823-1825), and the

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[13]Kimber, "Family, Friendship, and Community in the Life of Felix Mendelssohn," 31.

[14]Ibid., 33.

[15]Todd, *Mendelssohn's Musical Education*, x.

[16]A viewpoint often expressed by Eduard Devrient when belittling Mendelssohn's "critical fastidiousness." Kimber, "Family, Friendship, and Community in the Life of Felix Mendelssohn," 47.

Sommernachtstraum-Overture (published in its revised format in 1867, posthumously). Since these published works are all arguably of superlative quality, the value of publishing them was that they established Mendelssohn as a very gifted child prodigy, similar to Mozart before him, as well as an able composer of distinguished lineage.[17] It stands to reason, then, that many of Mendelssohn's other compositions of these early years remained unpublished because he and his family did not see them as being good enough, especially by the standards set by his own published pieces and by the best works of the composers before him.

Mendelssohn's Perfectionism

Mendelssohn continued to work on many of his unpublished pieces after their initial notation, a fact observed by perusing his workbooks and his manuscripts.[18] He was intent on constantly revising, improving, and perfecting his music, in accordance with the principles of *Bildung*, so that his music would eventually meet his own expectations. The early compositions he failed to publish himself are a varied lot, including nearly all of his operatic stage works (save *Die Hochzeit des Camacho*, which was published in 1827), most of his other stage music, and vast amounts of orchestral, solo instrumental, and vocal music for both solo voice and ensembles. Of the compositions from 1820-1830, numbering approximately 209, only 51 were published during Mendelssohn's lifetime,

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[17]"A more or less direct pedagogical line...may be drawn from [J.S.] Bach through C.P.E. Bach, [J.P.] Kirnberger, and [C.F.C.] Fasch to Zelter and thence to Mendelssohn..."from Todd, *Mendelssohn's Musical Education*, 2.

[18]Todd, *Mendelssohn's Musical Education*, x.

implying that he found the clear majority, over seventy-five percent, of his early compositions unsuitable even after revision. The number of these early compositions to be published immediately after his death is somewhat remarkable; even more so is the fact that editions and facsimiles of manuscripts of some seventy of the remaining 150 of Mendelssohn's works from this period are now available for study and performance. These pieces are each useful, providing candid glimpses of the captivating composer at work in disparate genres. One such piece by Mendelssohn is the concert aria "Ch'io t'abbandono," completed on September 5, 1825, with text taken from the lesser-known opera by Pietro Metastasio (1698-1782) entitled *Achille in Sciro*. This study of the unpublished aria explores a rare example of Mendelssohn's setting of Italian text, his usage of musical and textual devices, and some possibilities surrounding the original performers of the piece. The study will also investigate possible motivations for the piece's composition.

CHAPTER 2

THE CONCERT ARIA: "CH'IO T'ABBANDONO"

The Text and Form of the Aria

The term *concert aria* denotes a dramatic setting of operatic text, to be performed as an independent composition, instead of within the framework of an entire opera. Traditionally, the concert aria is written for voice and orchestra. Occasionally, a concert aria is written for a small performing venue, such as a *salon*, and is then set for piano instead of orchestra. Many of the concert arias written by Mozart, Beethoven, and Weber were printed in both formats. Mendelssohn's concert aria "Ch'io t'abbandono," however, is not available in both formats; it is available only in a version for piano and voice (baritone or bass). Because its notation in the manuscript copy is fairly clean and neat, with only a few alterations, one may surmise that Mendelssohn was content with the piece being performed in its arrangement for piano and voice. Had he wished the piece to be performed with orchestra instead, or even eventually, he probably would have included in this version some indication thereof.

Mendelssohn was at once challenged and liberated by the dramatic possibilities of the concert aria. The nature of the compositional genre requires a profound interpretation of the text and a musical setting that conveys it, since the aria is presented without staging, costumes, sets, or other actors. Since the text is rarely if ever presented as a part of a larger dramatic unit, whether by internal reference or introductory material, the poetry of the libretto used can be seen as significant only for its inherent merits in rhyme,

meter, and colorful word usage. Separated from the whole of the libretto, the poetry is then much more malleable to the desires of the composer; a composer can use or discard portions of the text as he sees fit. Further, though the aria may be dramatically connected to the context of the libretto through association, this is only applicable to the composer himself and those few people who are aware of the connection. If the relationship is not elaborated upon by the composer, which is the case with "Ch'io t'abbandono," by providing character names, the title of the libretto, or even the name of the librettist, the significance of the operatic plot line can be seen as nebulous at best. Therefore, the lack of a presupposed dramatic context in the concert aria grants the composer a freedom from both the established poetic forms of the text and the histrionic foundation for the character. A given text can thus be used to express whatever the composer wishes to express. The *concert aria* is therefore an effective medium for the self-expression so prevalent in musical romanticism.

A focused discussion of the aria begins with a discussion of the text itself. The opera from which the text was taken, *Achille in Sciro*, was written for the wedding of Maria Theresa of Austria to Francis Stephen, Duke of Lorraine and first performed on February 13, 1736 with music by Antonio Caldara. The plot of the opera involves the discovery of the hero Achilles, who is hidden in female disguise, among the young girls of the court of Skyros, where his mother Thetis hid him after learning from an oracle about Achilles's untimely death. Ulysses, who is looking for Achilles to help in the Battle of Troy, cleverly discovers and exposes Achilles through music and a show of

magnificent weaponry.[19] The libretto was set by some twenty-seven other composers over the next eighty-nine years, ending with a setting by Piero Antonio Coppola (1793-1877) in 1825, the same year Mendelssohn set his concert aria.[20] The text Mendelssohn set is taken from two scenes in Act Three, after Achilles is revealed: scene four, a scene between Achille, Deidamia, and Nearco, where Achille speaks to Deidamia; and scene 6, where Nearco has a solo scene or monologue:

Scene 4:

Ch'io t'abbandono[21]	That I would abandon you
In periglio si grande! Ah no: sarebbe	In danger so great! Ah no: it would be
Fra le imprese d'Achille	Impious of Achille
La prima una viltà. Vivi sicura;	The highest vileness. Live surely;
Lascia pur di tua sorte a me la cura.	Let me take care of your fate.
Tornate sereni,	Turn serene
Begli astri d'amore;	Beautiful stars of love;
La speme baleni	Hope flashes
Fra il vostro dolore;	In your anguish;
Se mesti girate,	Your sad turning away,
Mi fate morir.	Makes me die.
Oh Dio! lo sapete,	Oh God! You know it,
Voi soli al mio core,	You alone are in my heart,
Voi date e togliete	You give and take away

[19]Reinhard Strohm, *Dramma per Musica: Italian Opera Seria of the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 108-110.

[20]*The Mellon Opera Reference Index: Opera Librettists and Their Works, M-Z*, s.v. "Pietro Metastasio: Achille in Sciro."

[21]Note the discrepancy in the Mendelssohn version on the word "abbandono," which is presented in the Metastasian libretto as "abbandoni." This change in spelling of the verb indicates a change in who it refers to: "abbandono" is first person singular, while "abbandoni" is second person singular. However, "abbandoni" does not agree with the use of the first person article "io" so Mendelssohn's version is more correct grammatically.

La forza e l'ardir.	My strength and my ardor.

Scene 6:

Cedo all sorte,	I leave to chance
Gli allori estremi;	The final laurels;
Non son più forte	There isn't enough strength
Per contrastar.	To fight it.[22]

The text is intended for two different characters, a fact observed by comparing a setting by Nicolò Jommelli (1714-1774) from 1749,[23] a translation of the text into English by the playwright John Hoole (in 1800),[24] and the edition cited above (which was intended as an authoritative collection of Metastasio's works, compiled in 1816-1819). It is clear that while these three works provide the text in the same standard layout--as two distinct *da capo* arias by two distinct characters--the Mendelssohn setting does not.[25] The fact that Mendelssohn draws the text from two different characters implies that he did not see his setting of the aria as a simple mirroring of Metastasio's operatic plot line. The sentiment of the first part of the text, as spoken by Achille, is noble and strong, claiming that he will take care of Deidamia's fate, while the sentiment of the last part of the text is one of

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[22]Pietro Metastasio, *Achille in Sciro* in *Opere di Pietro Metastasio* (Mantova: Pazzoni, 1816-1819), vol. 4, 303-306. Translation by author.

[23]Nicolò Jommelli, *Achille in Scijro: dramma per musica da rappresentarsi nel nuovo privilegiato: Imperiale teatro...in Vienna, l'anno 1749* (Vienna: Musik-Sammlung of the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, 1985), act 4 scenes 4 and 6. Translation provided by the author.

[24]Pietro Metastasio, *Achilles in Scyros* in *Three Centuries of Drama; English 1751-1800*, trans. by John Hoole (London: Otridge and Son, 1800).

[25]However, it is mentioned that in Francesco Corselli's (1702-1778) production in 1744 in Madrid, the solo scene for Nearco (Act 3, scene 6) was completely removed, so it could be that Mendelssohn's source was a similar setting (see Strohm, 110).

resignation and weakness, a sign of a lesser or ignoble character, such as Nearco; thus the text makes little dramatic sense by itself if it is left as a continuously flowing exposition. Mendelssohn does not present the text in a continuous fashion, however, but instead repeats portions of the text in such a way as to combine and intermix the words of Nearco with those of Achille. It is certain that the psychological implications inherent in such a setting are quite demanding of the actor and add to the appeal of the aria as a vehicle for the actor's own dramatic expression. However, Mendelssohn also clearly used his setting of the text as a demonstration of his own interpretations. Therefore, the piece showcases the self-expression of both the performer and the composer, which in turn demonstrates a fusion of Baroque performance practices with those of the romantic era. Further, when one combines these attributes of the aria with the classical themes used, one sees how the aria illustrates Mendelssohn's uniquely balanced romantic classicism.

Another example of Mendelssohn's fusion of styles can be seen in the aria's structural form. "Ch'io t'abbandono" is not set as a *da capo* aria, even though the form of the poetry demands it, but is set as a *cavatina-cabaletta*, a form that had come into vogue during the 1820s.[26] Mendelssohn had set at least two of these types of arias in his prior stage works,[27] and was certainly familiar with Weber's use of the form in *Der Freischütz* and his concert arias. "Ah! Perfido," a concert aria by Beethoven, written in 1795-6 and published in 1802, was probably well-known to Mendelssohn as well. It is a *cavatina-*

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[26]"Aria" found in the Glossary of Stanley Sadie's *History of Opera* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1980), 368.

[27]Douglass Seaton, "Mendelssohn's Dramatic Music," in *The Mendelssohn Companion* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001) 161.

cabaletta, and, coincidentally enough, also employed text from *Achille in Sciro*.[28] Furthermore, Beethoven included extra poetic material in his setting of "Ah! Perfido,"[29] just as Mendelssohn does in his setting of "Ch'io t'abbandono." This can be attributed to the fact that the *cavatina-cabaletta* is a larger-scale aria than the *da capo* aria, requiring at least an extra stanza of poetry for the three sections of the aria proper. The text of "Ch'io t'abbandono" and its aria "Tornate sereni begli astri d'amore" does not provide enough poetry for the three-section aria, it only renders enough poetry for a two-section aria. Thus, the text of "Cedo alla sorte gli allori estremi/ Non son più forte per contrastar" (Nearco's text) was possibly used by Mendelssohn as extra textual material for the extended form of the *cavatina-cabaletta*, as in Beethoven's setting. This is understandable since the *da capo* aria, the form of the conventional aria, was being used far less frequently during the 1820s than it had been in the previous century, even though the poetry of the Baroque era was still being used. Therefore, the combination of texts from two different sections of an opera was accepted because of compositional precedent. In Mendelssohn's later concert arias, especially both of his "Infelice!" arias (1834 and 1843), he made use of this same method of appropriating text from disparate sources. Though the use of text in this way might be seen as spurious in the context of a complete opera, its use in this way further implies that Mendelssohn did not intend it to be a part of an opera, but rather as an independent composition that was expressive and dramatic in

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[28]Perhaps Beethoven's setting introduced Mendelssohn to the opera, since it was rarely set by non-Italian composers, and Mendelssohn had not yet made his first visit to Italy.

[29]The text "Dite voi, se in tanto affanno non son degna di pietà?" is used in the last portion of Beethoven's aria, but is taken from an unknown source and does not rhyme with or share the sentiment of the previous text.

its own right.

As one examines the manuscript, one sees that clear choices were made by Mendelssohn involving editing the text and setting it for specific effect (see Figure 1).[30] In the case of the example in Figure 1, Mendelssohn crossed out text at the bottom of the fourth page of the manuscript,[31] the text "Voi date e togliete la forza e l'ardir/ Voi date e togliete la forza e l'ardir"(You give and take away my strength and my ardor/ You give and take away my strength and my ardor), and substituted the text "O Dio lo sapete, voi soli al mio core/ Voi date la forza e l'ardir" (O God, you know it, you only in my heart/ You give me my strength and my ardor). This alteration of the text shifts the sentiment from being one of resignation (You give *and take away* my strength and ardor), to being one of inspiration and optimism (You give my strength and ardor), which gives the character of Achille a more confident, heroic countenance. This also makes the character of Achille stand out in stark contrast to the character of Nearco, his fainthearted music teacher, and, in turn, contributes to the dramatic nature of the aria by presenting the character as a dualistic and conflicted individual. The emphasis on the word "Dio" causes an additional possible interpretation of Achille's outcry: a plea to God for help in this, his time of anguish. Even though the verbs used in this section, such as "sapete," "date' and "togliete" are all in second person plural and refer to Deidamia's eyes,[32] not to God in the

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[30]All figures (musical examples and illustrations) are found in Appendix C.

[31]Permission for use of these images of the manuscript has been granted by the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York, the holder of the manuscript.

[32]The text "sereni, begli astri d'amore," which literally means "serene, beautiful stars of love," is interpreted as a reference to Deidamia's eyes, not the actual stars in the sky.

singular, the reference could suggest a religious awareness that Mendelssohn acquired during this time of his life, due, in some part, to his official confirmation into the Christian faith. These considerations indicate that Mendelssohn desired to impart to the aria a new meaning, one different than that given in his first draft; so he altered the words to suit his concept of the music instead of altering the music to conform to the antiquated text. Mendelssohn demonstrates not only that the aria was a vehicle of his personal expression, but also that his own concept of the text's meaning was open to change and re-interpretation as he matured. Therefore, by his usage and revision of the flexible *concert aria* form, Mendelssohn reveals how his own beliefs and philosophies were still in flux at this time in his life.

Using the previous musical example (Figure 1), we also see evidence of Mendelssohn's continuing revision and alteration of a piece after it has been completed, a further demonstration of his drive for perfection in his music. A comparison of mm.105-111 (Figure 1), with a later section of the aria where the music and text repeats (see Figure 2, mm. 235-242), shows that though the text is not a literal repeat, it still has the shortened "Voi date la forza e l'ardir" phrase. Slight alterations of the established melody of the vocal line are also seen throughout the manuscript of the aria, such as in measures 48, 110, 137, 167, 171, 195-97, (possibly) 267, and 307. Even though the aria is seen here in its final format, these revisions could imply that Mendelssohn was not finished with the aria, that he left off in the middle of his work and never got back to it. Certainly, the revisions in these sections reveal Mendelssohn's confidence in setting the Italian language, which, in turn, exposes another facet of his thorough education. Most

important, however, is the demonstration of Mendelssohn's facility with manipulating text to more aptly express a precise musical message.

Mendelssohn's setting of the text in "Ch'io t'abbandono" shows the composer's considerable sensitivity to words and the impact they have themselves, as well as how traditional texts can be used in untraditional ways. Further, the revisions made on the aria demonstrate clearly Mendelssohn's work ethic and how it typically manifested itself in his unpublished works. His true adeptness, however, is manifest in the musical setting of the text and the setting of a textually-inspired accompaniment for the piano. Analysis of the musical aspects of the aria illuminates the most important qualities.

The overall form of the aria, as was mentioned previously, is loosely that of a *cavatina-cabaletta*. It is divided into the following sections: section one, recitative (14 measures); section two, *Andante con moto* (66 measures, *cavatina*); section three, *Molto Allegro* (204 measures, *cabaletta*); and section four, *Più presto* (52 measures including the transitional *Stringendo* section, the *coda*). Merely presenting a given aria in multiple tempi does not make it unified as a whole; Mendelssohn knew from his previous experience that the piece must be unified by motivic, tonal, textual, thematic, and stylistic devices as well.

Thematic, Tonal, and Textual Relationships

From the very first series of chords in the recitative, the listener hears a two-note theme that recurs throughout the piece, the descending minor-second interval. This interval represents the agony that Achille shares with Deidamia. This theme (see Figure

3)[33] will be referred to as the Despair Theme (marked DT in Appendix B) throughout this study. The theme manifests itself in the vocal line as Achille sings about his own pain and fears, or appears in the accompaniment as either an echo of Achille's pain or as a reassertion of Deidamia's anguish. The Despair Theme reveals itself in the recitative in measures 1-2, 4-5, and 12-13, resolving down to the strong beat each time. Its frequent recurrence unremittingly emphasizes the pain of Achille having to leave Deidamia to go to the Trojan War and the fear they both have that he will never return.

In measure 31, one hears a few notes of an ascending chromatic scale in the vocal line; it is heard again in measure 44. In measures 45-6, the theme that was hinted at before is now revealed in its complete two-measure form: a four-note chromatic scale pattern that repeats four times (see Figure 4). This theme also reappears throughout the aria, seemingly as a response to the Despair Theme. Since it often accompanies optimistic text and serves as a counter-theme of sorts to the Despair Theme, it will be referred to as the Hope Theme (or HT in Appendix B). This theme, used when Achille attempts to convince Deidamia that everything will be alright, provides a musical gesture of lifting, a dramatic sub-text of support and persuasion. It will appear in both the accompaniment and the vocal line, sometimes even synchronously with, or as a response to, the Despair Theme.

The third and final significant intervallic theme is the frequent occurrence of the ascending minor-sixth on words "forza"(strength), "l'ardir"(boldness or ardor) and

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[33]All musical examples not related to the composer's revisions are taken from: Felix Mendelssohn, "Ch'io t'abbandono" ed. by J. Michael Cooper (New York: Pierpont Morgan Library, [1825] 2001).

"contrastar"(to oppose or to fight) in the final sections of the aria (see Figure 5). Since this interval is mostly found on words implying struggle, it will be designated as the Struggle Theme (or ST in Appendix B) and indicates places in the aria where the character of Achille is attempting to overcome an emotion or situation; the interval is usually emphasized by a crescendo as well.

The key of the piece is A major; the tonality usually only strays from this key when it goes into the relative dominant, E major, and during the transitional sections (mm. 29-44, 134-152, and 286-297). Mendelssohn also employs a brief minor tonality in the sections of mm. 89-96 and 218-225. As in many pieces of the common-practice period, this aria makes use of secondary-function chords, such as augmented-sixths. These chords are found throughout the piece, especially in the transitional sections, when the tonality is shifting from the tonic to the dominant keys. In these sections, where E major is juxtaposed with A major, Mendelssohn adds *D sharp* to the tonality, providing both a leading-tone in E major and an augmented-fourth scale degree in A major. The appearance of the augmented-sixth chord, then, which uses the augmented-fourth scale degree as a cornerstone, is hardly surprising. A prime example is found in m. 44 (Figure 6). Notice the chords on beats two and four of the measure; the first one is the Italian augmented-sixth in A major, while the second, which includes all the notes of the first chord plus a B in both hands of the piano part, can be analyzed either as the dominant of E major (B-dominant) or as a French augmented-sixth chord in A major. This duality of tonal character makes these chords excellent tools for modulation and for adhering to the formal requirements of the period. Also, when returning from E major to A major, for

example, Mendelssohn often emphasizes the *D natural* that belongs in A major, to emphasize the return to that tonality (see Figure 7). This emphasis results in a frequent progression from *D* to *C-sharp*, the interval of a minor-second that characterizes the Despair Theme. An observation can be made here that in the case of the return to A major, the tonic key, the composer is illustrating also the inexorability of the fate of the character of Achille. In this way, he further solidifies the impact of key relationships in the piece and applies the effect of stress and release inherent in diatonic music to underscore the dramatic situation of the character. Thus, Mendelssohn's use of secondary-function chords in this aria is a distinct indication of both his firm connection to compositional precedents and his desire to reinforce the formal structure of the concert aria by the use of traditional key relationships.

Another method that Mendelssohn uses to draw the concert aria into a cohesive unit is the use of text. As previously described, he possibly used the unrelated text from Nearco's scene to fulfill the aria form and its requirements. Beyond that, in many places in the aria, the text seems to be repeated at random, with segments of earlier text appearing in otherwise inappropriate places, such as towards the end of the aria, mm. 286-296. Here, text from mm. 219-222 reappears, but in a disjunct format with no musical or thematic similarities to the section where the text was last heard. It is significant that only once in the entire 338 measures of the piece does Mendelssohn actually repeat both the text and the music of a previous section; this occurs in mm. 219-241, where a repeat of material from mm. 90-113 is found. The text of mm. 90-113 is used again in the end of the piece, but with none of the melodic, rhythmic, or harmonic

material of either of these two sections. In fact, a ground-bass figure (Motive **24** of Appendix B) found earlier, in mm. 178-190, is used here in mm. 286-296, connecting this section (mm. 286-296)) with mm. 178-190 musically while it is connected to mm. 90-113 textually. Thus, Mendelssohn, by using the text as a reminiscence of previous sections, establishes a formal connection between these sections, despite what the musical figures might indicate to the contrary. The remarkable interrelationship of the music and the text are especially prevalent in the middle section of the aria, mm. 90-241. Appendix A shows how this middle section, by a mixture of thematic, textual, and motivic relationships, is constructed palindromically, having an invertible structural form.

Appendix B of this document provides an overview of the motives in the aria, as well as a graph illustrating where they occur within the piece. Through perusal of the appendix graph, one notices that Mendelssohn has provided the listener with a great variety of larger musical themes and motives in this piece (at least twenty-six). Some of the motives, though distinct gestures by themselves, make use of the three smaller intervallic themes discussed above as aspects of their structure. The motives that are constituted in part by these intervals, are used in places where the inherent textual implications of these smaller intervals are most poignant, i.e. in places where the sentiment is despair, hope, and/or struggle. The motives that use the Despair Theme are Motives **1**, **6**, and **24**; the Hope Theme appears in Motives **5**, **7**, **15**, **16**, and **25**; and the Struggle Theme appears in Motives **14** and **20**. The reason for this is obvious: the melodic material of the motives is often made up of the intervals given in the smaller themes. Occasionally, both the Despair Theme and the Hope Theme appear in some of

the same motives, seemingly struggling against one another, such as in Motives **4**, **12**, and **13**. These sections of the aria are the places of the greatest conflict in the mind of Achille, as well as the places where the text, music, and thematic material all vividly interlace; they require a brief discussion to illustrate their poignancy.

The first appearance of Motive **4**, in mm.34-36 (Figure 8), demonstrates the thematic and dramatic antagonism between the Despair Theme found in the vocal line, and the Hope Theme, presented in the right hand of the piano part. The left hand of the piano part carries the Despair Theme in augmentation, lasting two whole measures, as opposed to two beats in its standard form. Meanwhile, Achille sings to Deidamia the text, "La speme baleni fra il vostro dolore" (Hope flashes in your anguish), speaking of the simultaneity of hope and pain in both their hearts: hope that he will return, pain in the notion that he will not. The word for hope is cleverly set with the Despair Theme, while the word for pain is set with a portion of the Hope Theme, reflecting further the exquisite precision of the composer at capturing the dramatic conflict conveyed in the text.

The second appearance of Motive **4** is in mm. 146-150, set to different text this time (Figure 9). The text "Non son più forte per contrastar" (There is not enough strength to resist) is equally dualistic in its meaning. Achille is speaking Nearco's text here, but the meaning remains clear: he is trying to resist the despair of the situation, but his resolve is flagging and he will soon give in to his feeling of sorrow. The Despair Theme and the Hope Theme are in the same voices, but in altered form, to further emphasize the movement in the accompaniment, which provides an additional rhythmic pulsation on the C-major chords. Very subtly, the minor-sixth interval of the Struggle Theme (E-C) is

presented in chordal inversion in the piano, suggesting an additional context of the word "forte" (strength). Perhaps the very subtlety of Mendelssohn's treatment of this theme is a representation of how the very desire to struggle has subsided as Achille has been singing.

Motives **12** and **13** are essentially a sequential modulation of one motive, but are presented as two distinct motives for the purpose of precision in the analysis. Both times the motive appears, it is set with the text "Oh Dio lo sapete, voi soli al mio core/ Voi date e togliete la forza e l'ardir" (Oh God, you know it, you alone in my heart/ You give and take away my strength and my ardor). Also, the second time it appears, there is little alteration of the music or the text, so, for practical considerations, only the first appearance of the Motive **12-13** sequence, from mm. 89-97, is presented (Figures 10a, 10b). One immediate observation is the sheer number of thematic occurrences: in seven measures, there are sixteen statements of the Despair Theme and five statements of the Hope Theme (including octave doublings). This section of the aria exhibits the only prolonged use of minor tonalities in the aria: D minor in the first four measures, E minor in the second four measures. Also there are copious numbers of secondary-function chords in this section, especially augmented-sixth chords, as well as many occurrences of chromatic intervals. The chromaticism is so prevalent in this excerpt because of the effusive use of the Despair Theme and the Hope Theme, which are both built on chromatic intervals. Achille's magnified anguish here is due to his acceptance that Deidamia's eyes are the source of his strength and that without seeing them, he will surely perish. Thus, his duty to leave and do battle alongside Ulysses in the Trojan War is

all the more difficult, since without the strength he gets from seeing Deidamia's eyes, he will surely die and never see her, or her eyes, again. This portion of the text is heard for the first time in this section of the aria, making the sudden introduction of the minor tonality all the more potent. Compounded with this is the arresting use of *ritardandi* in these places, and the exclamation, "Oh Dio!" (Oh God!) at the start of the text. Mendelssohn quite confidently sets up his own A major tonality and rapid tempo in mm. 81-89 that seem to be effectively contradicted by the minor tonality and markedly slow tempo of mm. 89-97. Not only is this another example of his recognition of the dramatic aspects of the text and his ability to elicit wonderful effects from the music in combination with the text, but it is an example of his youthful adventurousness and confidence.

The aria "Ch'io t'abbandono" demonstrates the compositional prowess of Mendelssohn in a genre that was fairly new to him, at an age when the entire corpus of his published works was non-vocal. It shows his confidence at selecting the appropriate text, while showcasing his hitherto largely unexplored gift for setting the Italian language. It shows also his adeptness at dramatic composition and his subtle mastery of the art of fusing text to music. It is little surprise that his older friend Eduard Devrient made it one of his greatest ambitions in life to help Felix Mendelssohn succeed as a composer of dramatic stage works.[34]

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[34]A common thread of discussion throughout Devrient's *My Recollections of Felix Mendelssohn, and his Letters to Me* [1869], trans. Natalia MacFarren (New York: Vienna House, 1972).

Performance Demands of the Aria

The recent availability of the aria in modern edition[35] has made it available for performance in today's concert venues. With the flourishing of Mendelssohn studies in the last thirty years, the rising valuation of the composer's works from his early period, and the American premiere of the concert aria in New York City on February 2, 2002,[36] it is important to assess the qualities of the aria as they pertain to its performance.

Tempo markings in the score indicate a gradual increase in tempo from the initial *Andante con moto* through the *Molto Allegro* second section and into the final, faster *Più Presto* coda. These tempo changes directly relate to the changes in text that mark the growing passion of Achille. It should be noted that even though there are tempo markings throughout the aria, the piece does not contain any metronome markings, which illuminates a fundamental challenge in preparing the aria for performance: the juxtaposed difficulties of, at times, considerable phrase length and rapid melismatic writing. One example of a long phrase in the aria can be found in measures 187-198. This twelve-measure phrase can present extreme difficulties for the singer if a rapid tempo is not established prior to beginning the phrase. An opportunity to do so is given at measure 81, when the aria begins its *Molto Allegro* section. Conflict between phrase length and ornamentation arises at this point in the aria because of the difficult melismatic writing in the piano part, which indicates a series of sixteenth-notes in the right hand of the piano. Since Mendelssohn does not indicate any change in tempo where the phrases for the

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[35]"Ch'io t'abbandono" ed. by and John Michael Cooper (New York: Pierpont Morgan Library, [1825] 2001).

[36]With Kurt Willett, baritone and Johannes Somary, fortepiano.

voice are most lengthy, such as measures 187-198, the performers must agree on a metronomic tempo for the entire *Molto Allegro* section (beginning over one hundred measures earlier) that is both fast enough for the singer and slow enough for the pianist. Furthermore, the tempo established in this section must be slow enough for the performers to credibly execute the *Stringendo* leading in to the final *Più Presto* section.

The challenge of establishing tempo for the *Molto Allegro* section is intensified by the presence of a meter change from 4/4 to 2/4 when the tempo changes (measure 81). This change of tempo which coincides with the metric change can be interpreted as either a redundancy (indicating no real change of movement other than that inherent with the change of note values and meter), or it can be interpreted as an actual change of beat speed (implying that the tempo of a quarter note of the *Molto Allegro* section should be approximately four times as fast as the prior *Andante con moto* section). In the former case, the tempo established is too slow for the singer to perform the long phrases, while in the latter case, the tempo is far too fast for the pianist to play the notes as written. Thus, tempi must be established by the performers which are not specifically consistent with those marked in the music by Mendelssohn: fast tempi when the phrases are long, slower tempi when the note-values are smaller. Mendelssohn was surely aware of the imprecise nature of the tempo markings he provided; the few markings Mendelssohn provides show only general guidelines for the performer. This allowance for the performers to make their own informed decisions about tempi further illustrates Mendelssohn's appreciation for this inherently Baroque performance practice.

Consideration should be given to the dramatic requirements of the aria, especially

since the text of the aria is the words of two different characters, Achille and Nearco. The dichotomy of two characters in one aria provides the performer with a valuable tool for interpretation. For example, by observing the places where the character of the aria "switches voices" the performer adds focus and clarity to the presentation of the aria. It is significant that in every case where the voice of the aria switches, there is a notated change in dynamics and/or tempo. By accentuating the dynamic markings and tempo shifts provided by Mendelssohn, the singer portrays the character conflict within the aria much more convincingly. If the aria is performed without sensitivity to tempo and dynamics, not only are the nuances of the piece neglected, but the stamina of the singer is also compromised.

The length of the aria is significant: at least nine minutes in duration. The tessitura is moderately high, especially when the tempo is faster at the end of the aria. Even though the range is fairly standard for the period, requiring three low A's and three high F-sharps along with a number of F's and E's in places of special dramatic emphasis, one finds the majority of the higher notes are in the second half of the aria, a further reflection of the growing emotional intensity of the aria. Cumulatively, the demands of the aria upon the baritone are therefore quite substantial, since the tempo, tessitura, and dramatic fervor of the aria all culminate at the very end of the lengthy aria. Thus the aria would be most effectively performed by a baritone of not only developed technical skill, flexibility, strength, and resiliency, but also one who is well practiced with the florid style of Rossini, especially regarding the long *crescendi* and *accelerandi* so characteristic of Rossini's style.

Eduard Devrient and Franz Hauser

Beyond the composition itself, one must explore the performance history of the concert aria and consider for whom he may have written the work. Mendelssohn's circle of friends and acquaintances was constantly growing as he got older; by the time he wrote this aria, when he was sixteen, he had met and socialized with literally hundreds of the cultural elite and musicians in Berlin, Paris and elsewhere. Unfortunately, no mention of the aria specifically in letters or publications has yet been discovered, and only the following excerpt in a letter by Moritz Hauptmann even acknowledges that Mendelssohn ever composed any concert arias:

> Spohr, Mendelssohn, and Rietz, not to speak of many others, have written Concert Arias meant to be vocal, and intended to show off the best powers of the singer, for whom they were composed. But who can call them vocal?[37]

Of course in this instance, he was probably referring to a later concert aria Mendelssohn wrote, the 1843 concert aria "Infelice!," which had appeared in published form in 1851. Hauptmann wrote the letter in 1868, well after Mendelssohn had died, so he was certainly not referring to one of Mendelssohn's other concert arias, which had not yet been publicly performed. Though the letter does not refer specifically to "Ch'io t'abbandono,"it does provide a clue about the nature of Mendelssohn's concert aria composition: the notion that each was written with a specific singer in mind. By

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[37]Moritz Hauptmann, *The Letters of a Leipzig Cantor, being the Letters of Moritz Hauptmann to Franz Hauser, Ludwig Spohr, and Other Musicians* (London: Novello, Ewer, and Co., 1892), 158.

surveying his letters, it becomes apparent that, of the few baritones he mentions, he most likely wrote the aria specifically for either Eduard Devrient or Franz Hauser.

Eduard Devrient had been a friend to the Mendelssohn family since January 1822, when he began performing Mendelssohn's operatic works in the Mendelssohn household. His association with Mendelssohn continued for the next several years as the young composer continued to mature. During February 1824, Eduard married his fiancée Theresa, an event that put Eduard's relationship with Mendelssohn under strain, in part due to the amount of time Devrient spent with his young bride, away from Felix. Devrient's absence from Felix's life continued until approximately November 1824, when Mendelssohn rejected an opera libretto Devrient had written for him, *Gerusalema liberata*, presumably because of the seriousness of the subject. According to Devrient, the real reason Felix rejected the libretto was that Felix had been busy working on Klingemann's *Die Hochzeit des Camacho*, which he wanted to keep secret from Devrient. *Camacho* was completed August 10, 1825,[38] just before the concert aria; perhaps the aria was written for Devrient to perform in Mendelssohn's home. This notion is further solidified by the friendship of the two men and possible motivations the composer had for his selection of this text specifically, motivations that will be explored in the next chapter.

Franz Hauser (1794-1870) met Felix Mendelssohn in the summer of 1825, the summer that Mendelssohn completed the aria. After they met, Mendelssohn took Hauser

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[38]Eduard Devrient, *My Recollections of Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, and his Letters to Me* [1869], trans. Natalia MacFarren (New York: Vienna House, 1972), 1-20.

to meet his teacher, Carl Zelter, for whom he sight read music from Bach's Mass in B minor. This acquaintance bolstered an ongoing study of Bach for the three musicians.[39] Felix, having heard the voice of Hauser, would certainly have had a good reaction, since the baritone was heralded as having beautiful high notes by the critics.[40] Zelter may have pressed Mendelssohn to write an aria for Hauser out of deference to Hauser's talent. Taking into account the demands of the aria, it seems likely that Hauser, who was renowned as an accomplished performer of Rossini,[41] could have handled the technical demands of the aria with ease.

The original performer cannot be decisively determined without discovering at least some specific mention of the piece in a primary source. Eduard Devrient is a distinct possibility because of his long-standing friendship with Mendelssohn, while Franz Hauser is a prospect due to his vocal traits. Each man may therefore have been involved with the selection of text, initial conception, composition, and eventual performance of the aria, and the salient qualities of the piece would certainly have appealed to either one of them. In a like respect, a given singer today will surely find aspects of the aria that appeal to him in particular, so the aria is thus attractive to modern interpreters as well.

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[39]Dale A. Jorgenson, *The Life and Legacy of Franz Hauser* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 20-21.

[40]Ibid.

[41]Ibid., 30.

CHAPTER 3

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SETTING

Stylistic Significance

The motivation for writing the piece in the first place is also an engaging subject for discussion. Exclusive of Mendelssohn's desire to write this piece with a specific performer in mind,[42] the composer might have had a number of other motivations for selecting the text and setting it the way he did. Mendelssohn, who had recently completed his first and only opera for public release, *Die Hochzeit des Camacho*, was probably feeling optimistic about his career as an operatic composer. The composition of the concert aria reveals Mendelssohn's curiosity about Italian opera and its potential as a vehicle for his dramatic talents. Mendelssohn had composed four operatic compositions by the time he composed the concert aria, including *Die Hochzeit des Camacho*, and would compose a total of six operas by the time he was twenty. Even though Mendelssohn did not actually compose any operas and operettas other than ones with comic libretti, and did not complete any after 1829, the implication is strong that he desired to be a respected composer of opera from an early age. Mendelssohn spent many years of his life searching for an opera libretto that would enable him to launch his career

[42]This is a distinct likelihood, given that not only were his other concert arias dedicated to specific performers, but so were various sacred works he later composed, such as those discussed by Georg Feder in "On Felix Mendelssohn's Sacred Music," *The Mendelssohn Companion*, ed. Douglass Seaton, trans. of article Monika Hennemann (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001), 267.

as an opera composer,[43] but he never found one that met his criteria. Part of the reason for his difficulty was his series of requirements,[44] including that the plot needed to be "serious, but not tragical," unlike contemporary opera plots, "a subject in which some virtuous, heroical deed was celebrated...which...represented the triumph of some noble striving feeling," with the chorus as a principle character, and a libretto of historical significance. These demands for a libretto are a clear demonstration of not only the influence of A.B. Marx,[45] but also of the firmly entrenched classicism that was a keystone of Mendelssohn's compositional style and musical aesthetic. These are all demands met by the Metastasian libretto of *Achille in Sciro*. It stands to reason that even though the younger Mendelssohn's desires for an opera libretto are not as clearly developed as they were later in life, as demonstrated in his letter to Planché, the selection of this text for the concert aria is certainly relevant.

The text, if selected for Mendelssohn by someone else, could have been chosen for several reasons. It may have been selected by the singer for whom it was being written, possibly as a vehicle for his own exploration of the Italian language or as a piece for vocal and dramatic display in concerts. It may have been chosen by Zelter as an

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[43]Monika Henneman, "'So kann ich es nicht componiren': Mendelssohn, Opera, and the Libretto Problem,"In *The Mendelssohns: Their Music in History*, ed. John Michael Cooper and Julie D. Prandi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), ch. 9.

[44]Laid out in a letter to James Robinson Planché from February 12, 1838, reprinted in Historical Views and Documents after Douglass Seaton's "Mendelssohn's Dramatic Music" in *The Mendelssohn Companion*, 252-3.

[45]Devrient states that Marx thought that "supernatural subjects such as the *Freischütz* were henceforth exhausted, and the hopes of opera rested upon the working up of subject from grand historical events," in *My Recollections*, 41.

exercise in setting the Italian language and a further exploration of adapting texts for the *cavatina-cabaletta* form. If Mendelssohn selected the text himself, it was certainly at least partially because of his own desire to be an operatic composer; at this point in time, even with the success of Weber's and Beethoven's operas, it was necessary to compose at least some serious opera in Italian. Since Mendelssohn was a student of previous composers and compositional styles, he would have looked to prior composers who had achieved success in opera, such as Mozart, for guidance. Mozart's desires to compose *opera seria*, which led Mozart to the composition of *Idomeneo* and *La Clemenza di Tito*, can be seen as a response to his own success as a composer of *opere buffe* and Singspiel.[46] Mendelssohn's exposure to this progression of Mozart's style would have served as validation for his own composition of *opera seria*, the next logical course of action from his own early work with Singspiel. The composition of the concert aria, for Mendelssohn, can be seen as a step, however tenuous, in that direction. Furthermore, it was both a nod to the efforts of previous composers and the theme of classical antiquity, so it appealed to Mendelssohn's dualistic sense of romantic classicism. Accordingly, if the Metastasio text was selected for Mendelssohn by another party to set, it has importance because it is part of the foundation for his later ideas about libretti; if it was selected by Mendelssohn himself, it was important as a reflection of his operatic compositional goals. In either case, Mendelssohn's use of the text had, at the very least, an impact on his style and aesthetic.

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[46]Eric Weimer, *'Opera Seria' and the Evolution of Classical Style* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984), 1.

Biographical Significance

The choice of this particular text may have had biographical significance as well. The early operatic compositions of Mendelssohn demonstrate some references to himself and his family and friends, for example: the French officer Felix in *Die Soldatenliebschaft* (1820), the character of Fanny in *Die beiden Neffen* (1823), and the later composition of *Die Heimkehr aus der Fremde* (The Homecoming From Afar, 1829) for his own homecoming from London. Further, as a reference to his own education, the incarnations of Basedow and Pestalozzi became the characters Kinderschreck and Luftig in *Die beiden Pädagogen* (1821), reflecting Mendelssohn's awareness of his educational background.[47] The composition of *Die Hochzeit des Camacho* (the Wedding of Camacho) in 1825, certainly could have represented, in a general way, the recent wedding of Eduard Devrient. Thus, it makes sense that Mendelssohn had kept it secret from Devrient: he may have meant it as an homage of sorts.

This leads one to consider the autobiographical ramifications of the concert aria as well. The text, from *Achille in Sciro*, reflects both the words of Achille and those of Nearco. It is significant that the character of Nearco is Metastasio's substitution of the original Greek character of Chiron, the centaur, the entity responsible for teaching Achilles about music and how to play the harp. Certainly one can make the connection between the influence of Zelter on Mendelssohn and the influence of Nearco on Achille, especially in Mendelssohn's setting, because the "voice of the teacher" (Nearco) is used

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[47]The plots and characters of these operas are discussed by Douglass Seaton in "Mendelssohn's Dramatic Music" in *The Mendelssohn Companion*, 145-175.

in the concert aria in addition to the voice of the student (Achille). In analysis of the music, one can certainly find many characteristics of Zelter's compositional style (the teacher's voice) manifested in Mendelssohn's writing, such as melodic doubling in the accompaniment, use of simpler keys, and chains of secondary dominants.[48] This has a further impact when one equates the reciprocal influence of Zelter and Mendelssohn to the impact that Nearco's text has on Achille's text and vice-versa. The flavor of Nearco's text was, to recall, that of lassitude and ambivalence, while that of Achille was of confidence and loving devotion. The texts commingle in the second part of the aria, creating an altogether different textual message, that of a mature resignation to deal with challenges in an emotionally disconnected manner. Thus, the combination of the texts of teacher and student are similar to the fusion of Mendelssohn's youthful aggressiveness with the restraint and solidness of Zelter. The biographical significance of the text thus becomes apparent when it is seen as a parable of Mendelssohn's apprenticeship with Zelter. If this interpretation is valid, it further justifies Mendelssohn's appropriation of Nearco's text and its fusion with that of Achille.

The similarities between Achilles and Mendelssohn are not easy to overlook. In Mendelssohn's youth, he was pictured in drawings as having curly, long hair, similar to that of a young girl (Figures 11a and 11b)[49]. Later, in his early adolescence, he cut his hair well above his shoulders, a fact that Eduard Devrient noticed and commented on:

Meanwhile, the summer of 1822 had arrived... taking me through Dresden and up

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[48]Barr, *Zelter: A Study in Lied Composition*, 124-145.

[49]The drawings of Mendelssohn can be found in most biographies of the composer; these were taken from Mendelssohn, *A Life in Letters*, illustrations 1 and 4.

> the Rhine,...to remain some time at Frankfurt-on-the-Main. There in the street I met one day Dr. Heyse [Mendelssohn's tutor] and Felix, whose appearance had much changed; the pretty brown curls were cut short to the neck, the child's dress had given place to the boy's suit,- an open jacket over a waistcoat. The alteration was suited to his age, but I could not but regret his former unique appearance.[50]

Despite the incongruities between the dates on which the drawings were made and the date Devrient saw the boy on the streets of Frankfurt-am-Main, the fact remains clear: Mendelssohn's appearance until his teens was a very effeminate one. His later rejection of the long hair and dress he wore as a child shows his maturation into manhood (Figure 12),[51] similar in many ways to the divestment of Achilles in the women's quarters of Licomedes' palace and the hero's taking up of arms to go out into the world to wage war. In this way, the setting of *Achille in Sciro* establishes itself as an icon of this transitional time in Mendelssohn's life, when he was rejecting childish things and embracing the fate that his education, social background, and genius afforded him as an adult. It seems plausible that Devrient may have expressed his observations on Mendelssohn's maturation to Mendelssohn himself; if so, the aria could stand as a response of sorts to Devrient's commentary.

This composition, therefore, is a fusion of the cosmopolitanism, classicism, and pursuit of *Bildung* that so characterized Mendelssohn's compositional output. It presents, further, a suggestion that he may have pursued the composition of *opera seria* if the influence of Zelter, Goethe, and the German compositional style had not been so

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[50]Devrient, *Recollections*, 10.

[51]Jenkins and Visocchi, *Mendelssohn in Scotland*, 12.

Teutonic.[52] The piece shows his remarkable precocity and his sense of the dramatic possibilities of words and music, especially in combination. It shows his sense of self, his sense of humor, and his sense of awareness of the path that lay before him. The fact that he never published the piece, mentioned it in letters, or set the text to orchestral accompaniment, intensifies the notion that he wished the piece to be private, to be heard by none but his closest friends and family. However, the piece stands as a remarkably intimate reflection of the composer, his variegated education, and his remarkably diverse aptitudes, considerations that encourage this and other studies of Mendelssohn's early unpublished compositions.

[52]An observation made by Moritz Hauptmann, where he claims that Mendelssohn was initially Italianate in his compositions, akin to Mozart, but his later works were firmly within the German tradition, in his *Letters*, Volume I, 234.

APPENDIX A

FORMAL STRUCTURE

APPENDIX A

FORMAL STRUCTURE

Recitative, mm.1-14 (14 mm.)		Recitative in Allegro Vivace
A, tonic key of A-Major, mm. 14-30 (16 mm.) A^1, developmental, mm. 30-45 (15 mm.) B, dominant key E-Major, mm. 45-59 (14 mm.) ---modulatory section, mm. 60-64 (5 mm.) A^1, A-Major, mm. 64-80 (16 mm.)		Andante con moto, 66 measures
---Piano Interlude, mm. 81-89 (8 mm.) C, mm. 90-113 (22 mm.) ---Piano Interlude, mm. 113-120 (8 mm.) D, modulates to dominant key, mm. 121-137 (16 mm.) E, dominant key, mm. 138-152 (14 mm.) F, dominant key, mm.153-165 (12 mm.) E, dominant key, mm. 166-178 (12 mm.) D^1, dominant key, mm. 178-206 (28 mm.) ---Piano Interlude, modulatory, mm. 206-218 (12 mm.) C, tonic key, mm.219-241 (22 mm.) F, mm. 242-258 (16 mm.) E, mm. 258-270 (12 mm.) F^1, mm. 270-286 (16 mm.)	*Symmetrical Section of Thematically Related Material, mm. 90-241*	Molto Allegro, 196 measures
D, Stringendo section, mm. 286-298 (12 mm.) E, Più presto section, mm. 298-321 (12 mm.) Coda, mm. 322-338 (16 mm.)		Finale, accelerating to Più presto 52 measures

APPENDIX B

TEXTUAL AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS

APPENDIX B

TEXTUAL AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Key

Letter	Text it signifies
Recit	Ch'io t'abbandono in periglio si grande!, etc...
a	Tornate sereni, begli astri d'amore
a^1	begli astri d'amore
b	La speme baleni fra il vostro dolore
b^1	fra il vostro dolore
b^{11}	Fra il vostro dolore la speme baleni
c	Se mesti girate mi fate morir
c^1	mi fate morir
c^{11}	mi fate
d	Oh Dio lo sapete voi soli al mio core
d^1	Oh Dio voi soli al mio core
e	Voi date e togliete la forza e l'ardir
e^1	Voi date la forza e l'ardir
e^{11}	Voi date la forza
f	Cedo alla sorte gli allori estremi
g	Non son più forte per contrastar
g^1	Non son più forte
g^{11}	per contrastar

Smaller Themes

DT= Despair Theme, descending minor-2nd.
HT= Hope Theme, ascending chromatic pattern.
ST= Struggle Theme, upward leap of minor-6th.

Motives

1: mm.14-16, piano
2: mm. 18-22, voice
3: m. 24, piano
4: mm. 34-36, voice
5: mm. 45-46, piano
6: mm.49-50, voice
7: mm.51-52, piano
8: mm. 53-55, voice
9: mm. 55-57, voice
10: mm. 57-58, piano
11: mm. 81-89, piano
12: mm. 89-93, voice
13: mm. 93-97, voice
14: mm.97-105, voice
15: mm. 105-108, piano
16: mm. 105-113, voice
17: mm. 109-110, piano
18: mm.113-121, piano
19: mm. 125-128, voice
20: mm. 132-135, voice
21: mm. 155-158, voice
22: mm. 166-170, voice
23: mm. 174-178, voice
24: mm.179-180, piano
25: mm. 270-277, piano
26: mm. 286, piano, right-hand (rhythmic figure)

Analysis

(Letters or numbers appearing in italics represent a variation of the theme or motive.)

Measure	Text	Theme	Motive	Tempo	Key
1	Recit.			Allegro vivace	A major
2		DT			
3					
4		DT			
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					
11					
12		DT		Andante	
13					
14			M1		
15				Andante con moto	
16					

17		DT			
18	a		M2		
19					
20					
21					
22					
23	a[1]				
24	b	HT	M3		
25			M2		
26					
27					
28	b[1]				
29					
30	a	DT			Transitional
31		HT			
32	b				
33					
34	b	DT	M4		
35					
36		DT			
37	c	DT			
38		DTDT			
39		DT			
40		DTDT			
41	c[1]				
42		DT			
43	c[11]	DT			
44	c[1]	HTDT			
45		HT	M5		E major
46	a				
47			M5		
48	b				
49		DT	M6		
50	b[1]	DT			

51		HT	M7		
52		HT			
53	c	HT	M8		
54					
55	c[11]		M9		
56	c[1]				
57			M10		
58	a				
59					
60					
61		HT			
62					
63	a[1]	HT			
64			M3		A major
65	a	HT	M4		
66		HT			
67	a[1]	HT	M4		
68	b	HT			
69		DT	M5		
70	b[11]	DT			
71		HT	M6		
72			M1		
73	c				
74		DT			
75		DT			
76		DT			
77	c		M7		
78					
79	c[1]		M8		
80					
81			M11	Molto Allegro	
82					
83					
84					

85					
86					
87					
88					
89					
90	d	DT	M12		
91		DT			
92		HT			
93		DT	M13		
94	e	DT			
95		HT			
96		HT			
97			M14		
98	e				
99					
100		ST			
101					
102	e				
103					
104					
105		HT	M15	M16	
106	d	HT			
107		HT			
108					
109			M17		
110	e[1]				
111					
112		*ST*			
113			M18		
114					
115					
116					
117					
118					

119					
120					
121	f		M16		
122		HT			
123					
124		HT			
125	g	DT	M19		
126					
127					
128					
129	g		M19		
130		DT			
131					
132					
133	g		M20		E major
134		ST			
135					
136					
137					
138			M20		
139	g				
140		ST			
141					
142					
143					
144					
145					
146		DTHT			
147	g	DTHT	M4		
148		DTHT			
149		DTHT			
150		DTHT			
151					
152	g[11]	HT			

153		HT				
154		HT	M5			
155	f	HT		M21		
156		HT				
157		HT				
158		HT	M5			
159	g	HT		*M21*		
160		HT				
161		HT				
162						
163		DT				
164	g[1]		M19			
165		DT				
166	g	HT	M22			
167						
168						
169						
170		HT	M22			
171	g					
172						
173						
174		HT	M23			
175	g[11]					
176						
177						
178						
179	f	DT	M24			
180		DT				
181			M24			
182						
183		DT	*M24*			
184						
185						
186						

187	g	DT	M24		
188					
189		DT	M24		
190					
191		HT			
192		HT			
193		HT			
194		HT			
195		HT			
196					
197					
198					
199	g				
200					
201					
202					
203					
204					
205					
206			M11		Modulation
207					
208					
209					
210					
211					
212					
213					
214					
215					
216					
217					
218					
219	d	DT	M12		A major
220		DT			

221		HT				
222		DT				
223	e	DT	M13			
224		HT				
225		HT				
226		HT				
227	e		M14			
228						
229						
230		ST				
231	e					
232						
233						
234	e		M15	M16		
235		HT				
236						
237						
238						
239	e		M17			
240						
241		*ST*				
242		HT	M5			
243	f	HT		M21		
244		HT				
245		HT				
246		HT	M5			
247	g	HT		*M21*		
248		HT				
249		HT				
250		HT	M5			
251	g	HT				
252		HT				
253		HT				
254						

255		DT				
256	g[11]		M19			
257						
258	g	HT	M22			
259						
260						
261						
262		HT				
263	g		M22			
264						
265						
266		HT				
267						
268	g[11]					
269						
270		HT	M25			
271		HT	M25			
272	f	HT				
273		HT				
274						
275						
276						
277						
278		HT	M25			
279		HT				
280	g	HT				
281		HT				
282						
283						
284						
285						
286			M26			
287		DT		M24	Stringendo	
288	d[1]					

289				M24		
290		DT				
291				M24		
292		DT				
293	e[11]			M24		
294		DT				
295						
296						
297						
298	g		M22		Più presto	
299						
300						
301						
302						
303	g		M22			
304						
305						
306						
307						
308	g[11]					
309						
310			M26			
311	g[1]					
312						
313						
314						
315						
316	g					
317						
318						
319		ST				
320						
321						
322		DT	CODA			

323					
324					
325					
326		DT			
327					
328		DT			
329					
330					
331		HT			
332		HT			
333		HT			
334					
335					
336					
337					
338					

APPENDIX C

MUSICAL EXAMPLES AND ILLUSTRATIONS

APPENDIX C

MUSICAL EXAMPLES AND ILLUSTRATIONS

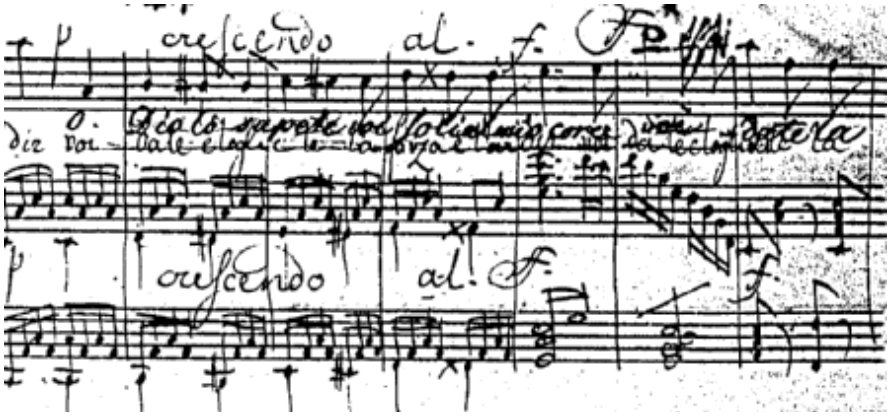

Figure 1, mm. 105-111

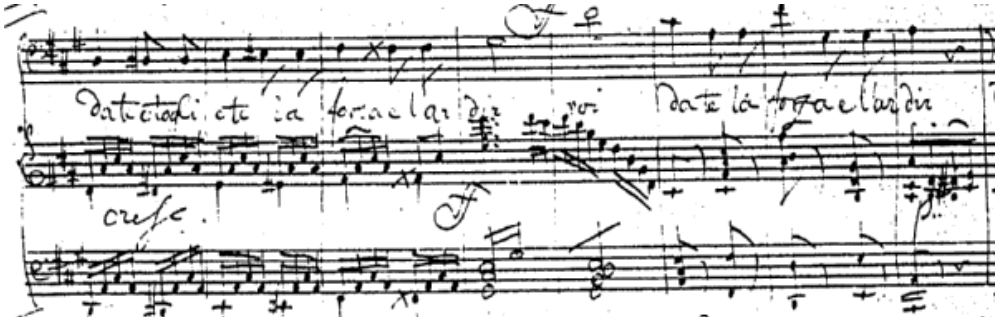

Figure 2, mm. 235-242

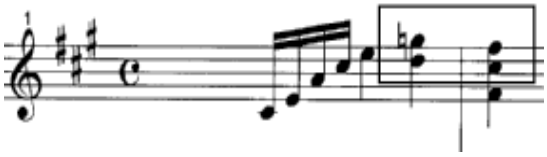

Figure 3, mm. 1-2. Despair Theme

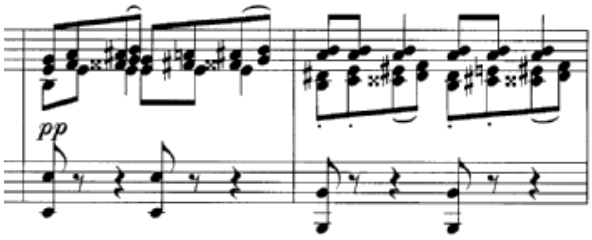

Figure 4, mm. 45-6. Hope Theme

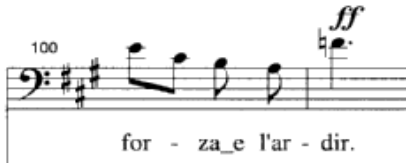

**Figure 5, mm. 100-1.
Struggle Theme**

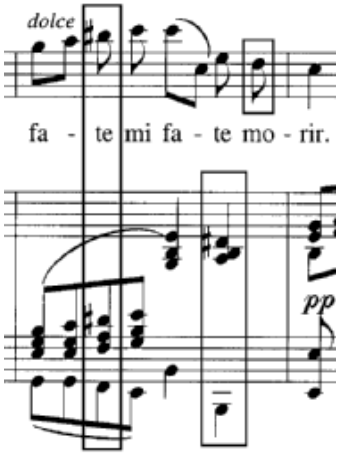

**Figure 6, m. 44.
Augmented Sixths**

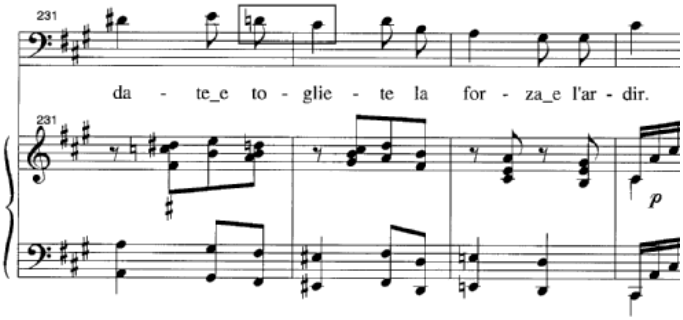

Figure 7, mm. 231-3

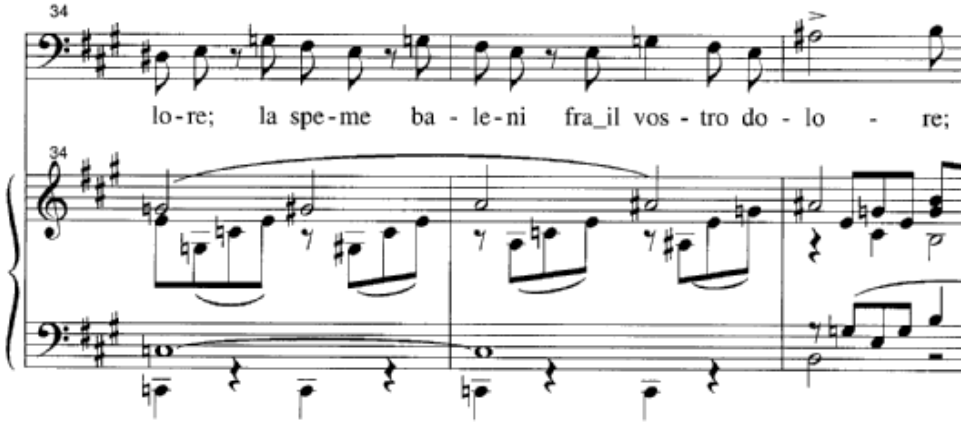

Figure 8, mm. 34-6. Despair and Hope Themes

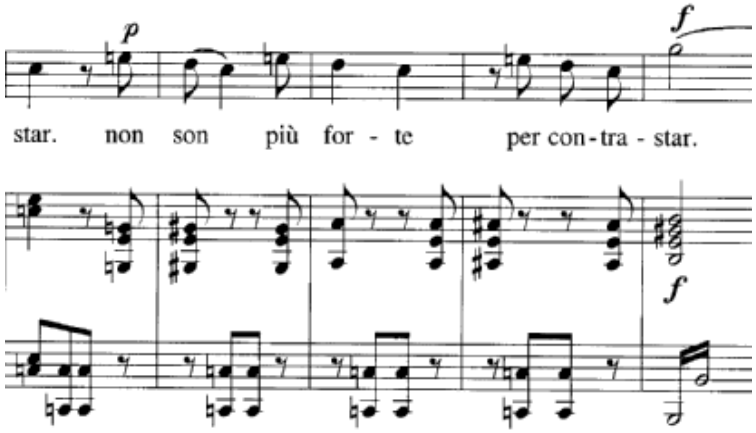

Figure 9, mm. 146-150

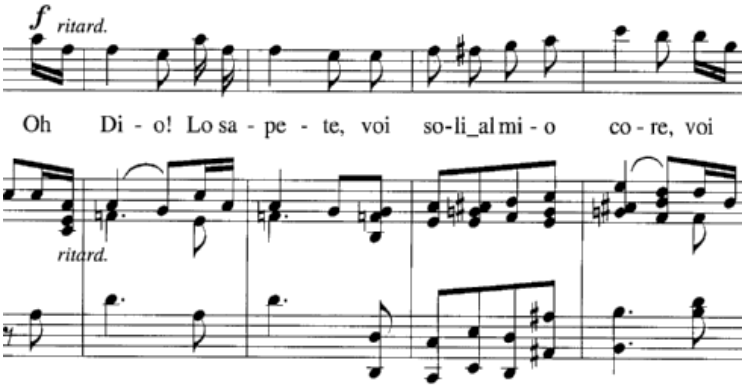

Figure 10a, mm. 89-93

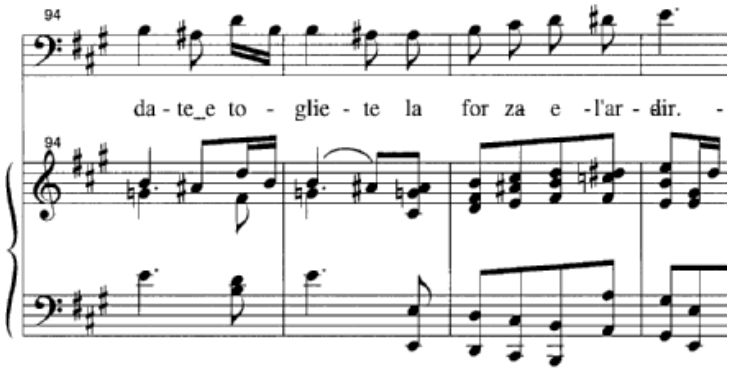

Figure 10b, mm. 94-97

A drawing of the composer by Wilhelm Hensel, 1821.

Figure 11a. Mendelssohn, 1821

A drawing of the composer by Wilhelm Hensel, November 14, 1822.

Figure 11b. Mendelssohn, 1822

J. W. Childe's watercolour portrait of Mendelssohn (1829)

Figure 12. Mendelssohn, 1829

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